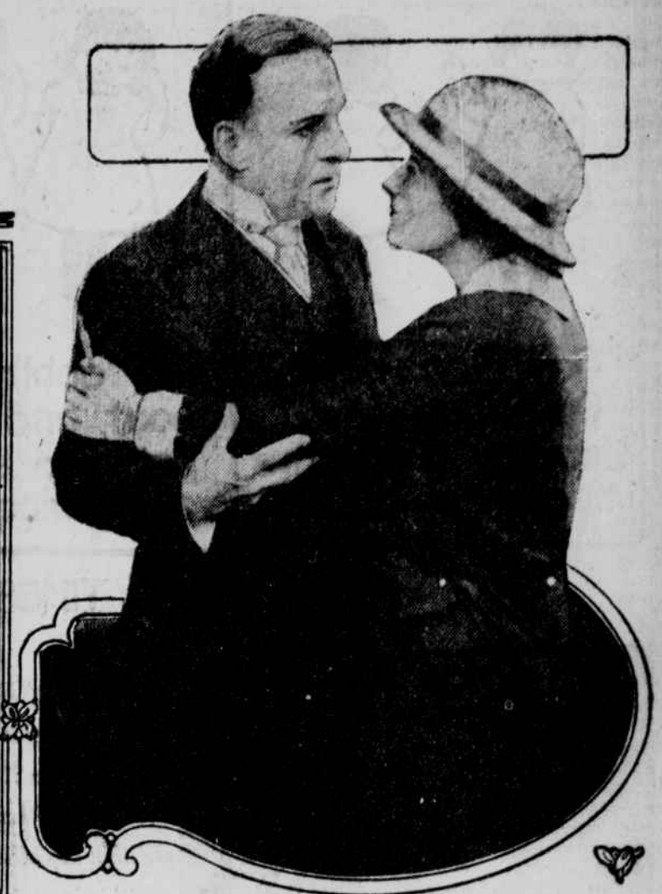
SUFFRAGE ENLISTS A NEW ALLY—MELODRAMA

It Forms the Plot-Compelling Motive of a Seven-Reel "Movie Thriller," in Which Dr. Anna Shaw, Villains, and "Poor, But Honest Working Girls" Abound.

MRS. MEDILL McCORMICK

DR. ANNA SHAW ADDRESSES THE SUFFRAGE "MOVIE" AUDIENCE



THE STATE'S GOVERNOR, HAS JUST SIGNED THE SUFFRAGE BILL, THEREFORE THE HEROINE'S WARM CONGRATULATIONS.

By ELEANOR BOOTH SIMMONS.

ANNOUNCEMENTS are being sent out of what may seem to some, at first thought, the most astonishing alliance of the season. Suffrage and melodrama are about to wed. The marriage will be solemnized on the moving picture films.

But let any ardent votes-for-women advocate who is inclined to condemn this as a mesalliance listen to the arguments of Mrs. Medill McCormick, the suffragist who popped the question to the Selig moving picture interests in Chicago. Mrs. McCormick says that the golden offspring which will come of this union would win over Susan B. Anthony herself. Also, she says that melodrama will take suffrage right into the cranium of the average citizen as no other agency could.

Mrs. McCormick Originated the Idea.

Mrs. McCormick, as everybody who reads the suffrage news from Washington knows, is chairman of the Congressional committee which, under the National American Woman Suffrage Association, is working for the enfranchisement of women by an amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Between times of running the headquarters in Washington she goes to Chicago, where her home and husband and baby are, and where she takes a hand in woman politics occasionally, too. It may have been on one of her trips between the two cities that she conceived, last spring, the idea of a suffrage photo-play.

There have been suffrage photo-plays before, of course. But their runs have been brief. They never "got across." The average audience, witnessing them, yawned behind its hand if polite, and, if impolite, laughed and went out. The writers of the scenarios administered suffrage straight, and, naturally, the average audience shied. Mrs. McCormick thought this over, and she went to the head of the Selig interests, William N. Selig.

"Mr. Selig," she said, "I believe there is a good business proposition in the right kind of suffrage motion picture play. It must be, of course, a play in which the arguments are so coated with melodrama that the audience won't realize what it is swallowing. At the same time, the arguments must be so penetrating that they'll work, once they are down. I'm sure, if we can get such a play, there'll be a good thing in it for managers as well as for 'the cause.' It will enable us to get at large numbers of people who would never come to suffrage meetings or stop to listen to a suffrage street-corner speech.

Suffragists Reach Only Suffragists?

"We suffragists spend too much breath talking to one another. We make too large a part of our own audience. We want to reach the crowds to whom you cater. The managers, on the other hand, would reap the benefit of the new element introduced into melodrama, which might prove a novelty for the average audience and which certainly would draw the support of suffragists, who are not inconsiderable in number now."

Mr. Selig listened, and, hard-headed business man that he is, gave Mrs. McCormick his hand on it.

"I'm not a suffragist," he said, "never was interested in it; but I'm with you here."

The pair went straight to Gilson Willets, whose latest photo-play, "The Adventures of Kathlyn," marked the high water of melodrama in the motion picture world. Mr. Willets caught the enthusiasm and set to work on a seven-reel production. Mr. Selig wired to New York for his best director, and offered free the use of his Chicago studio for rehearsals, which, seeing that the use of the studio is worth $100 a day and that rehearsals went on continuously from June until the middle of September, was quite a gift to "the cause."

An Unusual Cast.

Olive Wyndham forsook the "legitimate" stage for the time in order to pose before the camera as the heroine of the suffrage photo-play. Katherine Kaelred, leading lady in the Tyler production of "Joseph and His Brethren," gave up her role as a temptress to take the part of a woman lawyer battling for the right. Sydney Booth, of the "Yellow Ticket" company, who played with Grace George last winter in Winthrop Ames's all-star production of "The Truth" at the New Theatre, in New York, agreed to pose as the hero of the experiment. John Charles and Katherine Henry, well known to motion picture fans, came in for the parts of the villain and the "honest working girl" who is never absent from a melodrama. Along with the principals were engaged about three hundred secondaries, "supes," etc. The payroll for the production, it is said, was so large that it was like the payroll of a small factory.

And out of all this effort comes "Your Girl and Mine," of which a special performance was given at the Auditorium Theatre, in Chicago, the afternoon of October 14, and which will be seen this fall and winter at many of the largest motion picture theatres throughout the country. At least, Charles T. Hallinan, who has come on from Chicago for Mrs. McCormick to negotiate with the motion picture exchanges here, says that matters are proceeding most satisfactorily, and that if women can get the vote through melodrama. "Your Girl and Mine" will be the vehicle.

A Moral in Every Line.

Melodrama of the most thrilling sort it certainly is, in spite of the fact that a moral is concealed in the very title of the play, which hints that even as the injustices and dangers of a "man-made" world beset the two girls on the films, so they may overtake anybody's girl. But who is worried by a moral in a play which has an exciting hand-to hand fight between a man and a woman in one of the earliest acts? Who can doubt that she is looking upon melodrama when the events range from a wedding to a murder and a suicide, from the sobbiest kind of a "sob" court scene to an automobile abduction that breaks all former speed records?

That Symbolic Presence.

But where, suffragists may ask, does "the cause" come in? It comes in most subtly and poetically, a symbolic figure with "Votes for Women" across its breast, that "fades in" and "fades out," to use a technical phrase, at critical periods in the plot. Persons who saw the trial performance in Chicago say that this figure pleased the audience remarkably well.

Suffrage is also represented by "Aunt Jane," a robust lady who never fails to remind "Rosalind Fairlie," the heiress-heroine who mistakenly marries the villain, that if women had had a hand in making the laws she wouldn't find it so difficult to free herself from the villain's toils. And most of all it is represented by Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, who was grabbed on her way West, where she is now campaigning in the states that will vote upon woman suffrage November 3, and was made to star in a votes-for-women rally before the camera.

THE SYMBOLIC FIGURE, "VOTES FOR WOMEN" APPEARING TO KATE IN HER CELL

Dr. Shaw made quite a hit with the director of the rehearsal, who offered her a permanent job, Mrs. McCormick says. She also became very popular with the other actors, in spite of the fact that she did her level best to make suffragists of them all.

Dr. Shaw's Ability as a 'Movie Actress'

"Most moving picture actors," Mrs. McCormick said, "merely move their lips voicelessly in a speaking part before the camera. Not so Dr. Shaw. The opportunity of talking to an audience of three hundred persons wasn't to be neglected, and so rehearsal of the rally scene toward the end was enlivened by a witty suffrage talk from Dr. Shaw. When she had done it once the director said, 'Now, Dr. Shaw, I'd like another rehearsal.' Did she make the same speech that time? Not she. It was quite ap different one. A third rehearsal brought a new speech, and left the company wondering how many she had in her, anyway."

Considered from the moving picture play standpoint "Your Girl and Mine" is built on a scale which will make it of the big productions of the year, it goes. It has in its cast more people than appeared in "Quo Vadis." Being a seven-reel play it consumes an evening, and there are never more than three or four plays of that length brought out in one season.

The plot—well, it is not easy to give an idea of the plot in a few words. Briefly, though, it is built around three themes. There is the love motif, in the relation between Rosalind and the hero, Richard Burbank, the Lieutenant Governor, whom she marries in the end. There is the hate motif, in the relation between Kate, the poor but honest working girl, and Ben Austin, the villain. And there is what might be called the graft motif, in the relation between Ben and Rosalind, whose first husband he is, and who represents to him the raft that is to save him from the flood of pre-marital debts.

The Plot.

A fine example of loyalty from woman to woman is shown by Kate, who firmly resolves when she hears that the man whom she once loved, but now despises, is married to "the heiress of the Fairlie fortune," that said heiress shall never hear of her if she can help it. This resolve leads up to one of the most thrilling scenes in the play. It is in act two, when Kate, driven out of town by the persecutions of Ben, who feels that "no place is big enough for the two of them," has taken refuge in a shanty on the outskirts. She has lost her job in the factory, also through the influence of the malign Ben.

Her child and his is dead—burned to death in a tenement house fire, from which it might have been saved if there had been proper fire escapes. Aunt Jane makes a nice suffrage point here by pointing out that if women voted there would have been fire escapes.

Villain and "Poor, but Honest Working Girl."

Well, Kate is in her shanty and Ben comes to see her. He has exhausted every means to wring money from Rosalind, his wife. The creditors who came to cloud Rosalind's bliss on her very marriage morn have pursued him till he is nearly mad. Ben, by the way, is not a stereotyped villain. Mrs. McCormick wouldn't let Mr. Willets put in a stereotyped villain. She convinced him that it would be more effective to have Ben an attractive, rather lovable fellow when he weds Rosalind in the first act, and have him degenerate gradually as the consequences of his treachery to the poor but honest working girl and of his various excesses come to a head.

Lovable, however, Ben is not when he appears in Kate's shanty. He tells her with what the playwrights term brutal frankness that having exhausted every other means to get money from his wife he is about to disclose to her his past relations with Kate, and bid her "shell out" or have the scandal revealed to the world. He has sent Rosalind a note telling her to meet him there, and, indeed, through a window her automobile is perceived tearing down the road.

The Fight an Epic.

But even as Rosalind knocks at the door and Ben turns to unlock it, Kate flings herself upon him and wrests the key from his hand. The fight which ensues is pronounced by critics who saw the performance in Chicago one of the finest fights in the history of melodrama, whether in the "legit" or in photo plays. Fortunately, though it knocks down the stove, it doesn't reach the ears of Rosalind, who knocks three times and then goes away.

In the course of the fight, which from being merely a struggle for the key becomes a conflict in which all the pent-up hate between the two bursts into flame—melodramatists, please note and admire—Kate wounds Ben fatally with her cutting shears, which she snatches from him as he is trying to kill her. Kate shortly afterward commits suicide, and disappears from the film. Ben gets himself home somehow, and as a parting stab at his wife makes a will on his deathbed giving their two little girls to his father. This part of the plot is modelled on the well known Tillman case.

Children Are Kidnapped, of Course.

Of course, Rosalind kidnaps the children, and then comes the thrilling automobile chase, in which the mother is overtaken by the Sheriff just one yard this side of the state line. Rosalind breaks down, but Aunt Jane reassures her, and incidentally brings down the house, by saying:

"Never fear, my child; I will get you a woman lawyer."

The Fine Hand of the Woman Lawyer.

A court scene follows, with judge and jurors visibly overcome by the woman lawyer's plea and Rosalind's grief. It is asserted by spectators that when this scene was shown in Chicago sympathetic gulps were heard all over the house. Rosalind, of course, gets the children. Could a woman lawyer do less?

It must not be supposed that suffrage is forgotten all this time. Rosalind, shown in one of the first acts indifferently turning away from a suffragist who asks her to sign a petition, is convinced by her troubles that she needs the vote. It is she who introduces Dr. Shaw at the suffrage rally. At an outdoor meeting where she speaks she first meets the handsome Richard Burbank, who rescues her from some rowdies.

The Suffrage Bill Signed.

When the Governor of the state signs the suffrage bill Rosalind has lobbied through the Legislature Burbank is on hand to present her with the pen. In a subsequent scene he is discovered kissing Rosalind's children, and when she impulsively picks up the Governor's pen and exclaims: "Let this pen sign our marriage certificate!" the spectator heaves a sigh and feels that all is well with love and suffrage.

The next performance of "Your Girl and Mine" will be given at Nashville, Tenn., during the national suffrage convention there next month. Shortly after that, suffragists expect, it will appear as a commercial production all over the country. The arrangements which are being made will give approximately half the proceeds to "the cause," the other half going to the managers who present it.

Thrills Inevitable.

"I look for large sums of money from this," Mrs. McCormick said the other day, during a flying visit to New York. "But more important than the money are the converts it will undoubtedly make. What audience can fail to be moved by a play which shows a mother robbed of her children by the laws of the state—compelled to steal them away by night?"

Mrs. McCormick was asked if the fact that Rosalind gets her children by the award of the very masculine court, women are not yet voting, doesn't weaken the point of the play.

"Of course not," she said. "Doesn't a woman lawyer achieve it?"

SUNSHINE FOR FARMERS' WIVES

AMUSEMENT, sunshine, laughter and sociability—to bring them into the dull, workaday lives of farmers' wives and daughters is the purpose of a unique plan recently devised and demonstrated to be practical. And this means of socializing country life is a Little Country Theatre! It sounds frivolous, but it is the result of serious academic consideration and final working out into success by the North Dakota Agricultural College, at Fargo.

This Little Theatre seems to offer a real remedy for the dulness that drives young people out of the rural communities into the big cities, saving farms untilled and an even greater social stagnancy for those who must remain at home.

There is no question about the pressing nature for some solution of this country life problem. The annual exodus from the farm to the town caused by the revolt of the young against the intolerable dulness of rural life is costing the nation many a needed harvest.

In addition to the economical consideration, the monotony of country existence, it has been clearly determined, is a prime factor in the alarming increase in vice and crime, for even when it does not poison at the source it sends a host of eager, innocent country girls and boys to the dangers of an unguarded life in the cities.

This theatre is intended merely as an experiment station, to prove the plan's feasibility in connection with district schoolhouses, churches, halls, store basements, farmhouse parlors, and even barns, everywhere. It is believed that it has clearly shown that with a little energy all of these places may easily become laboratories for the development of rural interest and the happiness and social enjoyment of farmers, their wives and daughters.

The college has several hundred students of both sexes, and all of them are being poured into the jolly little dramatic crucible during the course of the year, either as actors, authors, stage hands, producers or choruses. There is no intent, however, to evolve the Great American Drama or to uncover potential Booths and Bernhardts.

The significance of the Little Country Theatre is entirely sociological. All that is desired is to have every young man and woman "get the idea," so that when they scatter at the end of the term they can carry on the good work in their own particular communities, and beyond. To this end every physical detail is marked by scientific simplicity. Seats, stages, scenery and settings are all planned so that they can be reproduced by any intelligent person with lumber, hammer, nails and a pot of paint.

Any one who is at all familiar with country life is aware that nothing attracts so much attention in the country, proves so popular, pleases so many, as a "home talent" play. As a dynamic force in bringing people together and building up a community spirit its importance cannot be overestimated. Nothing interests people in each other so much as habitually working together. A home talent play not only affords such an opportunity, but it also unconsciously introduces a friendly feeling in a neighborhood. It is something everybody wants to make a success, regardless of local differences of opinion.

The object of this theatre is to produce such plays as can be easily staged in a country school, the basement of a country church, in the sitting room of a farm home, in the village hall, or any place where country people assemble for social betterment.

The character of the productions are varied. Emphasis has been laid on the one act play and scenes taken from dramas depicting the life of various foreign people. One act plays are not only easier staged, but they also afford country people a better opportunity to write original productions. Many problems in their social life can be more effectively expressed in a thirty or forty minute play than by a two or two and a half hour treatment. Other forms of entertainment have also been introduced along with the one act play. In the vaudeville numbers the large foreign population may be called upon for its rich store of music, dancing and folklore, a single number thus permitting of the tapping of this undeveloped vein.

Another form the entertainment has taken is called "Nationality programmes." They portray the life, customs and costumes, work and pleasures of the land from which the immigrant, now a big factor in rural population, has come. In such fashion the new Americans secure a needed expression, while the native born gain in breadth and understanding, all to the end of greater unity and friendliness.

The dramatic ability and latent talent some of the students have displayed are really remarkable, and really creditable performances have been given of "A Fatal Message," by John Kendrick Bangs; "Miss Civilization," by Richard Harding Davis, and many other well known playlets.

While it is true that large cities, both at home and abroad, have Little Theatres, it is doubtful whether another Little Country Theatre, having as great a mission to fulfil, exists in this or any other country. Students of the drama are familiar with the Little Theatre in London; Reinhardt's Kammerspiele, in Berlin; the Théâtre des Arts, in Paris; the Chicago Little Theatre; the Little Theatre in New York City, and Philadelphia's Little Theatre. All of these theatres are in the cities, privately owned, performing a great but much different function.

The Little Country Theatre is complete in every detail. It is a large playhouse put under a reducing glass. Situated on the second floor of the administration building, it presents a most interesting appearance. It is just the size of an average country town hall, having a seating capacity of two hundred. The stage is thirty feet in width, twenty feet in depth, having a proscenium opening of ten feet in height, and fifteen feet in width. Boxes and balconies are absent. In the auditorium proper the decorations are plain and simple. The birch stained seats are broad and not crowded together; the scenery is painted in plain colors. The doors are of wood, the windows have real glass in them. Simplicity marks everything both on and off the stage. It is a model theatre for the open country or small village.

Even though the Little Country Theatre is scarcely started as yet, the idea has caught the farmers' wives and daughters like wildfire. Every performance is witnessed by rural envoys and delegations, from far and near, eager to see, to learn, to report, and it is only a question of months before a score of little country theatres will be firing away at dulness and monotony.